DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 248 536 CS 208 572

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TITLE The Part-Time Factor: A Critical Variable in Composition Instruction.
PUB DATE Mar 84
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (35th, New York City, NY, March 29-31, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Comparative Analysis; Full Time Faculty; Higher Education; *Influences; *Part Time Faculty; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Response; Universities; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Research
IDENTIFIERS Oregon

ABSTRACT

Initially, a study was designed to discover the effect of institution of employment--that is, community college or university--on teacher attitudes toward composition; however, employment status--part-time or full-time--more clearly accounted for attitude differences at both types of institutions. The study methodology involved a two-part questionnaire being mailed to 122 composition teachers at three Oregon universities and two Oregon community colleges. The first section of the questionnaire, the attitude identification component, consisted of scales for measuring teacher attitude toward instruction in written composition, while the second section contained questions on training, experience, and demographics. Additionally, follow-up personal interviews were conducted with six respondents. Results of a factor analysis pointed to a weakness in the scale items themselves--their tendency to limit attitude response to student-centered or content-centered priorities. However, the profile of the "average" part-time composition teacher emerged as female, under 40 years of age, having no Ph.D., having less than seven years teaching experience at the post-secondary level, and with graduate training in literature (not composition). If she had a teaching assistantship, it was very influential. It is concluded that prescriptive, content-centered orientation was evident among the part-time instructors and that further research should focus on the training of graduate teaching assistants and employment status. (HOD)

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ED248536

THE PART-TIME FACTOR: A Critical Variable in Composition Instruction

Research on writing instructior at the college level has focused primarily on student writing, the method of instruction, or most recently, the writing process. Little attention has been given to the writing teacher. We believe, however, that it is the writing teacher who is central to the students' experience in a composition class. It is the writing teacher, after all, who plans curriculum, presents instruction, shapes, and finally evaluates students' writing. Beginning from such a perspective, teachers' attitudes, that is their own priorities about who and what they teach, move onto center stage and new questions emerge for research concerning composition.

The study outlined below attempted to measure attitudes toward writing instruction among post-secondary school writing teachers in Oregon. Furthermore, it attempted to identify the demographic characteristics of this population and the formative influences on the attitudes they held. The types of questions explored included the following:

a. To what extent does graduate school training shape teachers' attitudes towards the goals of the composition course and the needs of the students?

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b. Is there a relationship between institution of employment and teacher attitudes towards writing instruction: that is, do community college teachers and university teachers of writing have different attitudes towards composition instruction?

c. To what extent do demographic variables, including age, sex, employment status, amount of composition instruction, etc. interrelate with particular attitudes towards composition instruction?

Although we were initially interested in discovering the effect of institution of employment (i.e. community college or university) on teacher attitudes toward composition, the effect of employment status (i.e. part-time or full time) more clearly accounted for differences in attitude at both types of institutions. In seeking substantiation for our findings in the literature we discovered that almost no previous research has focused on part-time teachers of composition. In fact, we were unable to find any article addressing the part-time status beyond the personal horror story variety. A recent national survey of college and university writing teachers conducted by Stephen Witte et al., did not even separate out the part-time teachers as a valid subgroup of college writing

teachers. Our research, however, suggests that employment status should be considered as a critical variable in any research on composition instruction. In this paper, then, we outline our research methodology but focus on the results specific to employment status.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection involved a two-part questionnaire. The first section, the attitude identification component, consisted of Scales for Measuring Teacher Attitude Toward Instruction in Written Composition, developed by Schuessler et al. in 1981. Their goal had been to devise an attitude measure which would go beyond existing instruments to include the breadth of instructional practices of contemporary writing teachers. Using 46 items from the 1971 NCTE Composition Opinionnaire, their questionnaire contained statements on such topics as the importance of grammar, experiential learning, talking about writing, literature, and letter grades. In their study, however, post-secondary teachers had been a small, undifferentiated part of the sample. By replicating their study with only post-secondary writing teachers in Oregon we hoped to test the appropriateness of the scales with this particular population.

The second section of our study, twenty-four original

questions on training, experience, and demographics, sought to identify possible formative influences on attitudes. In Oregon, students may complete their university writing requirement at the community college. Are the attitudes of teachers at both types of institutions, then, the same? Or are teacher attitudes influenced by institution of employment? By composition course load? By training of the composition teacher? By sex? By employment status? This second section thus provided information on variables possibly affecting attitudes as measured by the first section of the instrument, the attitude scales.

The questionnaire was mailed to 122 composition teachers at three Oregon universities and two Oregon community colleges. The response rate was 80%. Additionally, follow-up personal interviews were conducted with six respondents. These interviews clarified teachers' attitude statements and explored specific influences teachers felt to have been - or to continue to be - important to their view of composition instruction.

The first treatment of the data was on Part I, the attitude statements. Here we used factor analysis to see if responses from the Oregon teachers would yield the same scales that had emerged in Schuessler's study two years earlier and had been valid for a second, larger group of teachers in 1982 (Gere, A. R., et al. "Measuring Teacher Attitudes toward Writing Instruction," 1982). In the 1981 study, the

researchers had derived four scales measuring distinct areas of attitude labeled: 1) attitudes toward instruction in conventions of standard written English (SE), 2) attitudes toward the development of students' linguistic maturity (LM), 3) attitudes toward defining and evaluating writing tasks (DE), and 4) attitudes toward the importance of student self-expression (St. SE).

We also ran Cronbach's Alpha Test for Reliability with responses to this part of the questionnaire. The scores, .72 for SE, .75 for DE, .80 for LM and .73 for St. SE equaled or exceeded reliability scores found in previous studies with the scales. We thus judged reliability of the scales to be acceptable.

Factor analysis, however, yielded neither the four scales identified by Schuessler et al. nor meaningful new conceptual categories for the attitude statements as responded to by this sample of university and community college teachers. A four- three- and two- factor model were all rejected for their lack of meaningful explanation of variance among responses. We were thus led to consider the scales insufficient for general measurement of attitudes toward writing instruction.

Subsequent analysis of the items in the scales suggested two reasons for considering the scales to be insufficient. One was the predominance of prescriptive, content-centered items in the scale items, which suggested a product or error-eradication model of writing instruction. Of the 40

items, 20 were clearly prescriptive; others which suggested a process model of composition were worded in such a way as to seem prescriptive. For example, an item on revision read "Students should rewrite each paper regardless of the number or kind of errors."

A second explanation was the lack of items reflecting current research in writing instruction, i.e. teachers as writers, student self-concept and self-confidence as part of the course goals, and alternate classroom methodologies.

Results of factor analysis thus pointed to a weakness in the scale items themselves, that is their tendency to limit attitude response to student-centered or content-centered priorities.

The original intent had been to use analysis of variance to study interactive affects of grouped independent training, experience, and demographic variables on attitude categories that had been identified through factor analysis. In the absence of clear attitude categories, we decided to conduct analysis of variance with single attitude statements as dependent variables. Identifying four statements as representative of a content-centered view of writing instruction and four as student-centered, we ran analysis of variance which showed several statistically significant interactions. Since our findings of association were based on these individual attitude statements, we could not use them to generalize about formative influences on specific attitudes;

instead we used them to inform the direction of further study through the follow-up interviews, which provided more specific information on attitudes themselves and the formative influences on them.

FINDINGS

A. Demographic Profile

Scanning **TABLE I** on the following page will reveal some of the ways in which the part-time composition instructors in Oregon differ from their full-time counter-parts. More than 75% of the part-time instructors are female; over half are under forty years old and over 70% have no Ph.D. This "average" teacher has less than seven years teaching experience at the post-secondary level (85.4%), and almost all that teaching has been in composition. Her rank is lecturer or instructor and she teaches more than four composition courses a year, considerably more than her full-time counterparts at the university level. She is usually employed at a university, not a community college. She is not involved in her profession, that is, she is not a member of any professional organizations nor does she attend professional association meetings.

Not surprisingly, part-time instructors are like their

COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHICS, EXPERIENCE OF PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME FACULTY

Total N=98

Variable	Part-Time N=40 Adj. Freq. (%)*	Full-Time N=54 Adj. Freq. (%)*
Sex:		
Male	24.4	64.8
Female	75.6	35.2
Age:		
Under 40	56.1	34.5
Over 40	43.9	65.5
Degree:		
No Ph.D.	70.7	51.9
Ph.D.	29.3	48.1
College Teaching Experience:		
Under 15 yrs.	85.4	56.4
15 yrs. or more	14.6	43.6
Rank:		
Lecturer or Instructor	87.8	38.5
Professional	12.2	61.5
Actual Composition Courses Taught Per Year:		
3 or less	12.2	53.7
More than 3	87.8	46.3

Institution of Employment:		
Community College	31.7	32.7
University	61.0	67.3
Preferred Institution of Employment:		
Community College	13.2	30.2
University	86.8	69.8
Graduate Training in Composition Teaching:		
Substantial	29.2	13.0
Some or none	70.8	87.1
Influence of Teaching Assistantship:		
None or Hardly any	15.4	32.6
Somewhat Or very	84.6	67.5

full-time colleagues in a number of ways. Their training in graduate school was in literature, not composition. In fact 82.4% of the part-time composition teachers we surveyed had had no graduate rhetoric courses and 66.7% had no teaching methodology courses. Also like their full-time counter-parts, if they had had a teaching assistantship, it was very influential.

B. Attitude Profile

Through cross tabulation of single attitude statements and the factors just described a clear pattern emerged of prescriptive content-centered responses from teachers at both community colleges and universities who taught part-time, did not have a Ph.D., had seven years or less experience, and had been strongly influenced by a teaching assistantship. No other group of independent variables exhibited such a consistent association with dependent variable attitude statements.

TABLE II shows four items selected from the scales as representative of prescriptive or developmental attitudes. While the pattern of agreement with prescriptive, content-centered items held true for part-timers in many more than these examples, we chose these four because they are a striking juxtaposition of differing attitudes.

TABLE II

RESPONSES TO CONTRASTIVE ATTITUDE STATEMENTS
BY CATEGORIES OF TEACHERS

	Prescriptive, error-eradication items			
	grammar important as logic		distinguishing among forms of discourse important	
agree	PT, nonPh.D., univ	(70%)*		
	FT, nonPh.D., cc	(70%)		
	Under 15 yrs. exp. w/strong TA influence	(60%)	PT, nonPh.D., Univ	(64%)*
dis-agree	FT, nonPh.D., univ	(75%)	PT, nonPh.D., cc	(64%)
	15 Yrs. or more w/ strong TA infl.	(70%)	PT, Ph.D., Univ	(70%)

	Developmental, positive expectation items			
	grammar knowledge not helpful in writing development		given freedom, students discover from	
agree	under 7 yrs. exp. no TA infl.	(67%)	FT, non Ph.D., cc	(69%)
	over 7 yrs. exp., nonPh.D.	(55%)	FT, nonPh.D., Univ	(42%)
	over 15 yrs. exp. cc	(64%)		
dis-agree	under 7 yrs. exp., w/ strong TA infl.	(50%)*	PT, nonPh.D., univ	(43%)*
	Ph.D., all exp. levels	(60%)	PT, nonPh.D., cc	(36%)
	under 7 yrs., nonPh.D.	(38%)*		
	over 15 yrs., univ	(45%)		

Key: PT = part-time; FT = full-time; univ = university; cc = community college; yrs. exp. = years of experience; TA infl. = teaching assistantship influence; * = nonPh.D., part-time, under 7 years experience, with strong TA influence.

The first two attitude statements affirm the importance of grammar as logic and the need for studying forms of discourse in the composition course. In almost direct opposition, the second pair of statements assert that students allowed to write freely will discover forms for themselves. In a micro-version, these pairs of statements represent the prescriptive error-eradication, or content-based approach to teaching writing and the developmental or student-centered model.

A pattern of agreement with the first pair and disagreement with the second was evident at both institutions from teachers who were employed part-time, without a PH.D., with under seven years of teaching experience, and a significant influence of a teaching assistantship. Their responses suggested a sense of the composition course as a body of knowledge, central to which are correct forms and standard conventions. No other distinct groups, by degree, institution, or years experience, emerged on the basis of responses to these attitude items.

Follow-up interviews with three part-time and three full-time faculty members yielded specific information relevant to part-time status. One part-time teacher at a community college felt that her part-time status tended to make her a bit stricter, more formal in her teaching. She mentioned using course evaluation forms regularly, even though her department did not require them. Hoping to eventually be

hired full-time, she wanted full documentation of teaching success.

A full-time community college teacher volunteered the self-imposed responsibility of overseeing part-time teachers and reporting such observations to the department head. Complimenting the part-timers at the community college as being "pretty close to the sincerity and professionalism" of the full-time faculty, this faculty member clearly saw part-time status as reflecting lower professional ability. The remark suggests another aspect for study in teacher attitudes toward composition instruction; the definition of, and attitude towards one's peers in teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

When the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education issued its report in 1972 it suggested that the use of part-time faculty would be one "minor" way of responding to the needs of higher education. By 1978 part-time faculty outnumbered full-time faculty 2.1:1 in community colleges (American Association of Junior Colleges, 1969-79). Despite the enormous growth in the use of part-time faculty, economic and policy questions concerning their use have still not been addressed. While the use of part-time faculty may allow for administrative flexibility in response to student demand, our research

suggests that part-time employment may be more than just a status of employment; it may have implications for the attitudes of teachers towards the subjects that they teach. The prescriptive, content-centered orientation of the newest, least professionally secure teachers was evident in our research. Although we did not examine specific sources for this content-centered orientation, in degree level, length of experience, or teaching assistantship, we did find an interaction between these variables and prescriptive attitude statement responses. Our suggestions for future research then mostly address the training of graduate teaching assistants and employment status.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP: The interaction between a strong influence of a teaching assistantship and prescriptive attitude statement responses bears further study. One extension of the research would be to study present teaching assistants in graduate English programs in Oregon. What criteria are used for hiring teaching assistants as composition instructors? What preparation and direction are the teaching assistants given to conduct their classes? What assumptions about the teaching of writing do the faculty, the department head, or composition director have? In what way does the teaching assistantship affect graduate students' interest in teaching writing, their own development as

writers, and their goals relative to degree and career?

EMPLOYMENT STATUS: The influence of part-time employment on a teacher's attitudes toward composition instruction also warrants in-depth study. How do teachers form their concept of the goals of composition teaching? Are part-time teachers with relatively little experience more affected by prescriptive norms than are their more experienced, tenured colleagues? Or, as Tingle has suggested, are part-time teachers more prescriptive out of a desire to impress department heads and composition directors with their high standards and knowledge of composition as a discipline, and thus ensure continued, or even increased, employment? Are part-time teachers of composition more prescriptive than other inexperienced composition teachers who have more secure, full time status? To what extent do part-time composition teachers operate as members of the department, influencing curriculum in composition? Several participants in this study taught composition part-time at both a community college and a university. There are implications to this "circuit rider" role: how does such a teacher establish goals, in terms of content and students for the course? How does such employment affect the teacher's attitude toward composition instruction, and toward him or herself as a composition teacher?

We believe that research in composition should have as one of its components research on the writing teacher; such

research, however, is incomplete if it does not recognize the part-time writing teacher as a distinct category. Research on part-time teaching should have two foci. In one, institutional philosophy as well as policies underlying the use of part-time composition instructors would be studied. It would involve, in part, studying the impact of financial constraints on hiring practices, promotion, and curriculum development in an English department. A second focus would be on the part-time teachers themselves. What effect do they perceive their status has on their attitudes toward composition instruction? What is their preferred employment status and their preferred teaching assignment?

Over the past ten years post-secondary schools throughout the country have come to rely heavily on part-time teachers for teaching the required composition courses. Ironically, research and theory building in composition has also undergone a major explosion. As we rush to proclaim composition as a legitimate field of study and research, let's not forget who in fact does most of the teaching.

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